DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 941 UD 025 953

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TITLE The Changing Demographics of the Hispanic Family.
INSTITUTION National Council of La Raza, Washington, DC. Office of Research Advocacy and Legislation.
PUB DATE Jul 87
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Demography; *Family Income; *Family Structure; *Heads of Households; *Hispanic Americans; Marriage; Poverty; Pregnancy; Religion; *Socioeconomic Status; Unemployment

ABSTRACT

Hispanics will become the largest United States minority population sometime early in the next century. A problem that arises with attempts to provide Hispanic people with better opportunities is the lack of adequate data on Hispanic socioeconomic status. Those data which do exist focus on problems of the individual, yet one of the greatest strengths of the Hispanic community is its strong supportive family structure. This report presents the changing demographic status of Hispanic families and projects social trends for the next century. The major findings are: (1) Hispanics are more likely to live in multigenerational families than other Americans; (2) inadequate income is a major problem; (3) large families and those headed by females are especially likely to be poor; and (4) as the proportion of Hispanics grows in the United States population, the status of these families is more of a matter for concern. (VM)

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THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE HISPANIC FAMILY

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July 1987

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THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE HISPANIC FAMILY

I. SUMMARY

The Hispanic family has traditionally been viewed as one of the greatest strengths of the Hispanic community. Like other American families, however, Hispanic families are changing, affected by socioeconomic and cultural factors.

Hispanics are more likely than the overall population to live in family households rather than alone or with nonrelatives, and Hispanic families remain somewhat larger than other U.S. families. While the number of Hispanic single-parent households is increasing, as is the percentage of Hispanic children under 18 living with one rather than both parents, Hispanics remain less likely than the general population to be divorced. Hispanics also marry younger than other Americans, and Hispanic women are especially likely to marry while in their teens. Hispanic teenage pregnancy is increasing, and although the majority of teenage mothers are married when they have their children, most have not finished high school.

Hispanics appear to be more likely than other Americans to live in multigenerational families, and the Hispanic elderly -- a small but rapidly growing group who are expected to account for one-fourth of the increase in the Hispanic population during the next 20 years -- are less likely than Whites or Blacks to be institutionalized. Their service needs will represent a major challenge to Hispanic families and to the broader community in the future.

A major problem faced by Hispanic families remains inadequate incomes. The gap between Hispanic and White family income appears to be widening, while Hispanic poverty rates are increasing. Education is a major determinant of income, and Hispanics remain the least-educated major U.S. population. Hispanic married-couple families have lower median incomes than Black or White families with both parents present, which reflects both the relatively low labor force participation rate of Hispanic women and the fact that employed Hispanic men and women have lower median weekly earnings than Black or White workers of the same sex. Similarly, the families of employed Hispanics are more likely to be poor than those of Whites or Blacks. High rates of teenage unemployment and continued high dropout rates for Hispanic youth -- about half of whom leave school without a high school diploma -- threaten the future employability of young Hispanics, and may continue the dangerous trend of growing poverty rates.

Not surprisingly, large Hispanic families are especially likely to be poor, as are female-headed households. Fully three-fourths of Hispanic children under 18 in female-headed families live in poverty -- a higher rate than for Blacks or Whites. Poverty rates are especially high when the woman is under 24. Even when the female head of household is employed, poverty rates remain high. Since the proportion of female-headed Hispanic households is increasing, this Hispanic "feminization of poverty" represents a major cause for concern.

Hispanics are growing as a proportion of the U.S. population and work force; thus the strength and socioeconomic status of the Hispanic family represent a matter of concern not only to Hispanics but also to American society as a whole.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic population in the United States totaled 16.9 million in 1985, excluding about 3.3 million Puerto Ricans living on the Island. Hispanics are the second largest minority group and one of the fastest growing U.S. subpopulations; between 1980 and 1985, the Hispanic population as counted by the Census Bureau grew by 16%, compared to 3.3% for the overall population. Even according to conservative projections of the Census Bureau, Hispanics will become the largest U.S. minority sometime early in the next century, probably before 2015, and perhaps before 2010.

Hispanics constitute at least 7.2% of the mainland U.S. population and are a heterogeneous group; in 1985, 61% of Hispanics identified themselves as being of Mexican origin, 15% Puerto Rican, 10% Central and South American, 6% Cuban, and 8% Other Hispanic. Many of those in the "Other" category are descendants of Spanish settlers whose families have been living in the Southwest for many generations. While Hispanics live in every state, they remain geographically concentrated; half of all Hispanics live in California and Texas, and more than four-fifths live in these two states plus New York, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado.

Historically, one of the greatest problems faced by individuals and organizations concerned with improving opportunities for Hispanics has been the lack of adequate data on Hispanic socioeconomic status. Legislation in the form of the "Roybal Amendment" has gradually increased the extent to which federal agencies collect, tabulate, and publish data on Hispanics, although obtaining accurate and comprehensive information continues to be a challenge. It is particularly difficult to provide information on long-term trends in Hispanic socioeconomic status, because the 1980 Census was the first to ask all Americans to indicate whether they were of Hispanic origin, and most national surveys including a deliberate oversample of Hispanics are quite recent.

Most Census data and most analyses of socioeconomic problems focus on the individual. Yet one of the greatest strengths of the Hispanic community is its traditionally strong and supportive family structure. In addition, economic status -- and the factors which contribute to poverty and other socioeconomic problems -- are often best understood through analysis of the family unit. This statistical overview therefore concentrates not on individual statistics, but on information which describes the structure and socioeconomic status of Hispanic families. It also attempts to identify trends and provide some projections concerning the future of the Hispanic family.

III. HISPANIC FAMILY STRUCTURE

A number of trends have been identified for American families. For example, both men and women are marrying later, the divorce rate has increased greatly, an increasing proportion of children under 18 live with one rather than both parents, and there has been a major increase in unmarried-couple households. More married couples are childless than in the past, and the number of children per family is decreasing.

Hispanic family structure is also changing, but more slowly than between Hispanics and other major populations.

More than the overall U.S. population, Hispanics live in family households -- rather than alone or with nonrelatives. The March 1985 Current Population Survey identified more than 3.9 million Hispanic families; about 90% lived in family units, compared to less than 87% of all Americans.

In 1985, Hispanics 15 and older were more likely than Whites to be single and never married (31.2% versus 24.3%), but much less likely than Blacks (39.8%) to be unmarried. High rates of never-married persons are partly reflective of the youth of the Hispanic population; in 1985, the Hispanic median age was 25.0, compared to 26.3 for Blacks and 32.2 for Whites. The percentage of never-married Hispanics has changed very little in the past six years.

The number of Hispanic single-parent households is increasing. In 1979, 76.2% of Hispanic households were married-couple families, and 19.8% were headed by females; in 1985, the percentage of married-couple families had decreased to 71.7%, and the percentage headed by women had increased to 23.0%. As of 1985, Hispanic families were almost twice as likely to be headed by females as White families (12.8%), but only about half as likely as Black families (43.7%). Another way of putting it is that Hispanics constituted 5.6% of all U.S. families in 1985, but 8.9% of female-headed households. Among the subgroups, Puerto Rican families were the most likely to be headed by females (44.0%); their family structure was very similar to that of Black families. About three-quarters of families in all the other subgroups were headed by married couples, with Cubans having the lowest proportion of female heads of households (16.0%).

The percentage of Hispanic children under 18 living with one rather than both parents is increasing. In 1980, about one in five Hispanic children (21.2%) lived with one parent, but the proportion had increased to 28.8% in 1985. More than half of all Black children (53.9%) lived with just one parent in 1985, although the rate of increase between 1980 and 1985 was lower than that for Hispanics. The proportion of White children in single-parent families remained much lower and was growing at a lower rate; in 1985, 18.0% of White children lived with one parent.

Hispanics remain less likely than the general population to be divorced, but the Hispanic divorce rate is increasing. In 1985, 11.3% of all heads of families in the U.S. were divorced, as were 14.3% of Black householders, but only 10.2% of Hispanics. Similarly, 7.2% of all non-Hispanics 15 and over were divorced in 1985, compared to 6.2% of Hispanics. There are considerable differences by subgroup; in 1985, Central and South Americans and Mexican Americans were far less likely to be divorced than Puerto Ricans and Cubans (See Figure 1). However, divorce rates have increased steadily since 1970, when only 3.4% of Hispanics 14 and over were divorced.

Since Hispanic families are more likely than the general population to be female-headed but Hispanics are also less likely to be divorced, it is not surprising that Hispanic heads of households are more likely than those in the overall population to be married but not living with their spouses. In 1985,

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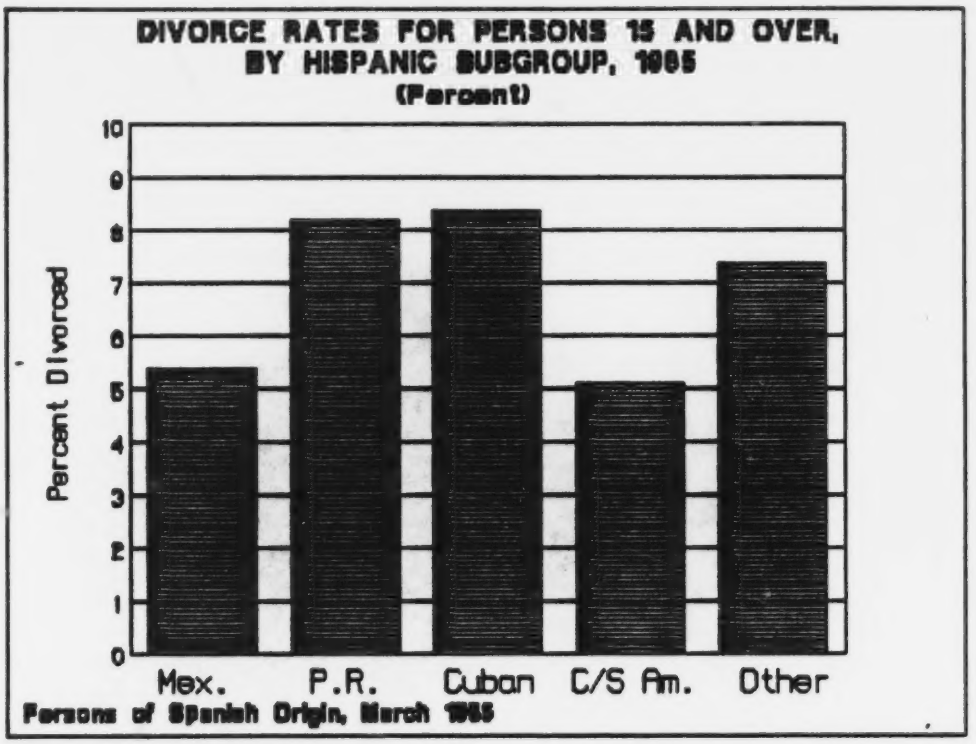
the percentage of Hispanics who were separated (9.8%) was more than twice the rate for the general population (4.5%), but slightly below the rate for Blacks (11.9%).

FIGURE 1



Hispanics marry younger than other Americans; Hispanic women as especially likely to marry while in their teens. While 4.2% of Black women and 17.7% of White women 15-19 in 1985 were or had been married, more than one-fourth (26.3%) of Hispanic women had married as teenagers. Teenage males were much less likely to have married, but 6.5% of Hispanic men 15-19 were or had been married, compared to 1.4% of Blacks and 3.7% of Whites.

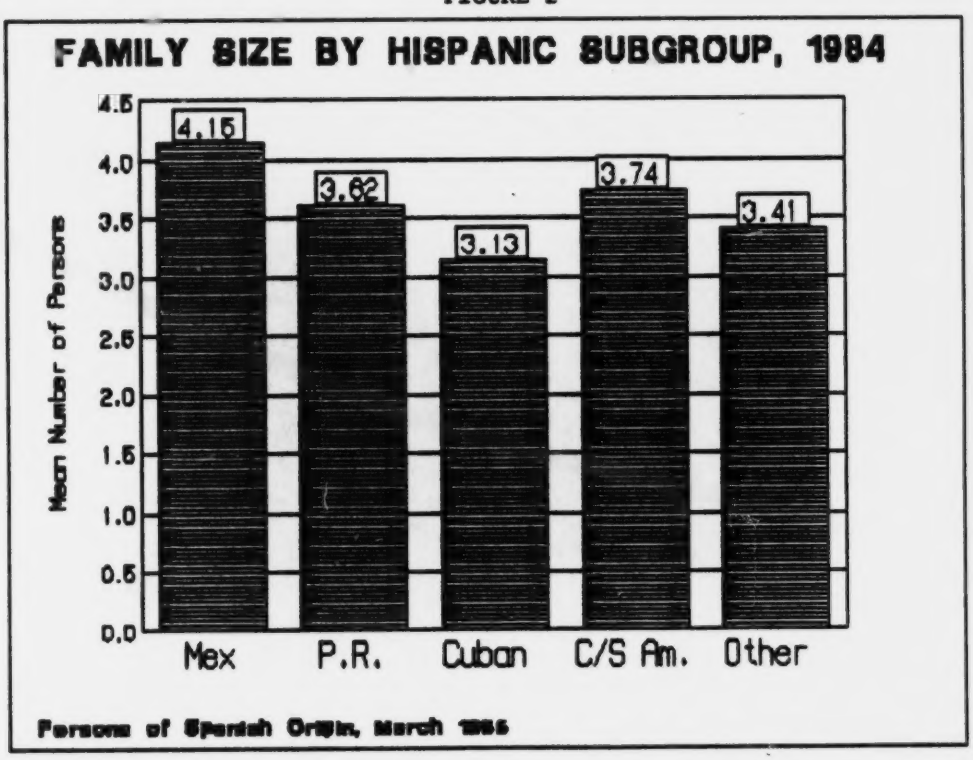
Hispanics are considerably more likely than Whites to have children. In 1985, about two-thirds (66.1%) of Hispanic families had children under 18, compared to less than three-fifths (57.4%) of Black families and less than half (48.2%) of White families. (A part of the difference between Hispanics and Whites is explained by the fact that the White population includes more older couples whose parents are over 18.) Among Hispanic subgroups, Puerto Rican (72.1%) and Mexican (68.5%) families were especially likely to have children.

Hispanic teenage pregnancy is increasing, and although the majority of Hispanic teenage mothers are married, most have not finished high school. In 1980, 7.3% of Hispanic 15-19 year-olds had babies, compared to 10.2% of Blacks and 4.5% of White non-Hispanics. The teenage birth rate varied greatly by subgroup; 8.9% of Mexican Americans, 6.8% of Puerto Ricans, and 2.2% of Cubans had babies. Hispanic teenage mothers were more likely than Blacks or Whites

to be married; 69.1% were married at the time their child was born, compared to 58.0% of Whites and just 14.6% of Blacks. There were major subgroup differences; 68.1% of Cubans, 52.4% of Mexican Americans, and 50.0% of Puerto Ricans were married. However, even among 18-19 year-olds, only 37.3% of Hispanic teenage mothers were high school graduates, compared to 55.6% of Whites and 56.0% of Blacks.

Hispanics are more likely than other Americans to have large families; 6.7% of Hispanic families had seven or more members in 1985, compared to 4.4% of Black families and just 2.0% of all U.S. families. There is wide variation in family size among Hispanic subgroups; Mexican Americans had the largest mean number of persons per family at 4.15, while Cubans had the smallest, at 3.13 (See Figure 2). Similarly, 9.8% of Mexican American families included seven or more members, compared to 4.2% of Central and South American families, 2.9% of Other Hispanic families, 2.5% of Puerto Rican families, and just 0.9% of Cuban families. Hispanics were more than three times as likely as Whites to have four or more children.

FIGURE 2



For Hispanics, the greater the educational attainment of the head of household, the smaller the mean household size. In 1985, the average family size was 4.16 for Hispanic families whose head had no more than eight years of schooling; it went down to 3.76 members where the household head was a high school graduate, and to 3.54 where s/he was a college graduate. For White Americans, there is no clear relationship between educational attainment and family size. For example, White families whose head of household had no more

than an eighth grade education had smaller families on the average (3.04 members) than the families whose heads of households had four or more years of college (3.23 members).

Hispanics appear to be more likely than other Americans to live in multi-generational families, although precise data are difficult to obtain. In 1985, 60.7% of Hispanic elderly were householders, and of these, 36.5% lived with a spouse or other family members, 23.6% lived alone, and just 0.7% lived with non-relatives. Of the 39.2% who were not householders, 37.4% (including 14.4% of men and 54.7% of women) lived in families. This group included many women living with husbands who were counted as householders. Another figure suggests the extent to which Hispanic elderly live in multigenerational families. About 39.1% of Hispanic elderly were widowed in 1985. Of this group, more than one-third -- 34.4% -- were not householders but lived in families (that is, with relatives). The corresponding percentage for all elderly Americans was only 15.3%.

The Hispanic elderly are also more likely than other elderly Americans to live in the community; 97% of Hispanics lived in the community in 1980, compared to 96% of Blacks and 94% of the total elderly population. Even at advanced ages, Hispanic elderly appear less likely to be institutionalized; at age 85 or older, only 10% of Hispanics were in nursing homes, compared to 12% of Blacks and 23% of Whites.

Available information about Hispanic family structure suggest that the Hispanic family is undergoing significant changes, but some national and minority trends have not yet affected Hispanics to the same degree as other American families.

IV. INCOME AND POVERTY

Hispanic families typically have median incomes above those of Blacks and below those of Whites, and poverty rates much higher than White families and slightly lower than Black families. Hispanics are the only major population whose poverty rate actually increased between 1984 and 1985. Many factors appear to influence income and poverty levels.

The gap between Hispanic and White family income appears to be widening, as shown in Figure 3. In 1972, Hispanic median family income was 71% of White income, in 1975 and 1980 it was down to 67%, and in 1985 to 65%. The 1985 median family income for Hispanics was $19,027, compared to $29,735 for Whites and $16,786 for Blacks. Available 1984 data indicate large income differences by Hispanic subgroup, as shown in Figure 4; Other Hispanics and Cubans had the highest median family incomes, and Puerto Ricans the lowest.

Significant differences in median family income are found by region, and the trends differ considerably by population group (See Figure 5). In 1985, Hispanic families in the Midwest had the highest median incomes, followed by those in the West, South, and Northeast. The variations were quite large, with median family incomes in the Midwest 45% higher than those in the Northeast. The figures reflect the fact that Puerto Ricans, who are heavily concentrated in the Northeast, have the lowest family incomes among Hispanics. For Blacks,

FIGURE 3

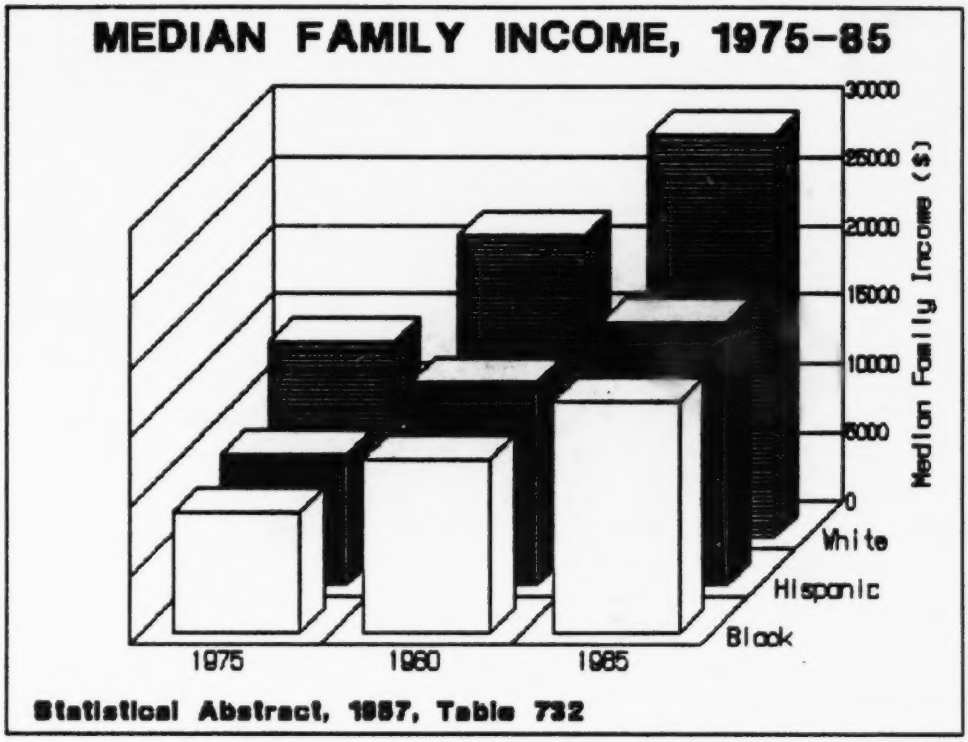
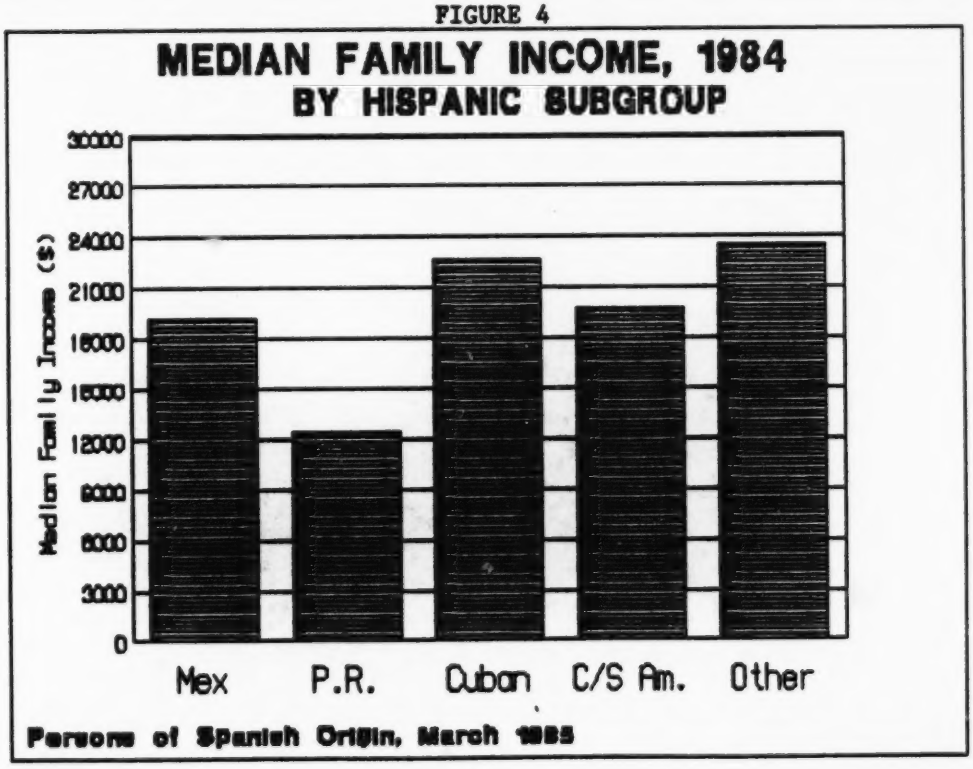
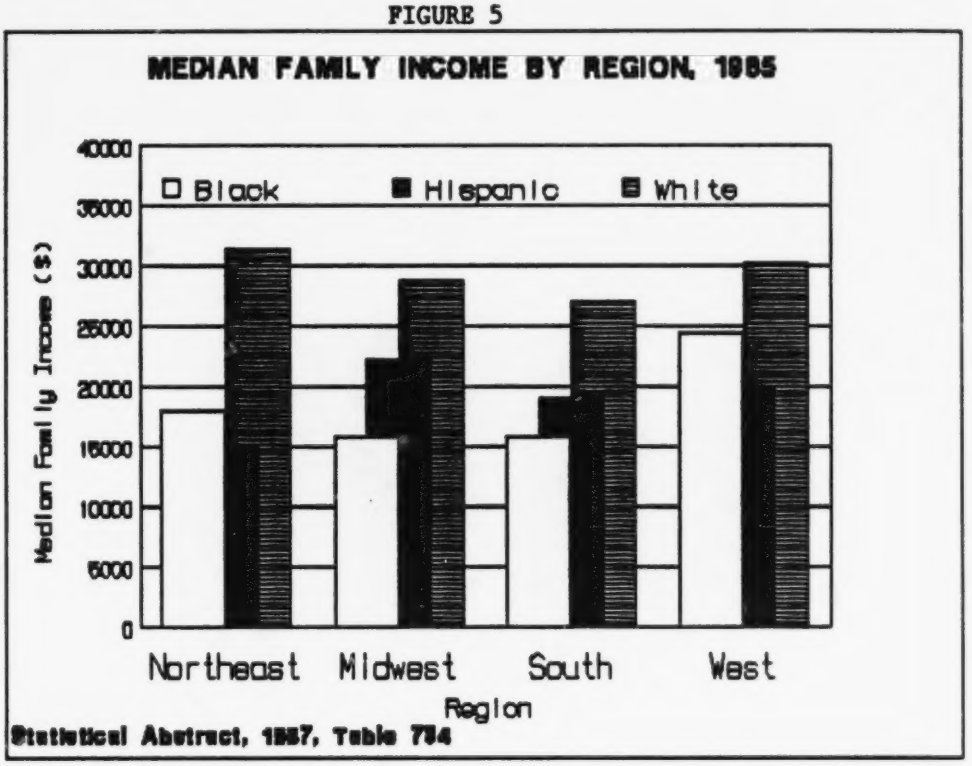


FIGURE 4



the highest family income was found in the West, followed by the Northeast, South, and Midvest; differences by region were large, as with Hispanics. For Whites, highest family incomes occurred in the Northeast, followed by the West, Midwest and South -- but differences by region were much smaller.

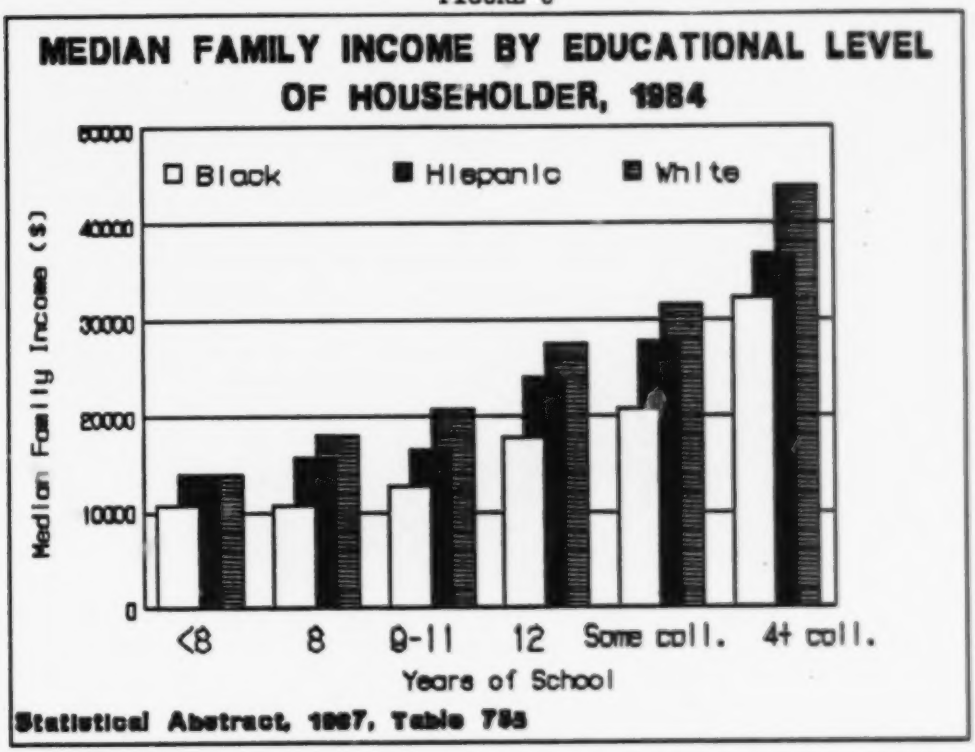
FIGURE 5



An analysis of family income by educational level of the head of household shows a strong relationship, but also indicates that increased education beyond high school may have less effect on Hispanic income than on Black or White income. For example, Hispanic families whose household head was a college graduate had 1985 median incomes 2.7 times as high as those with less than eight years of education; however, the multiplier was 3.0 for Blacks and 3.1 for Whites. On the other hand, Hispanic families appeared to gain the greatest income benefits from high school completion. Hispanic families whose head was a high school graduate had median incomes 1.5 times as great as those who had some high school; the multiplier was 1.4 for Blacks and 1.3 for Whites. Figure 6 shows median family incomes by educational level of the householder.

Hispanic married-couple households have lover median family incomes than Black or White families with both parents present. The 1985 median family income for married-couple Hispanic families was 91% of Black family income and 71% of White family income. This reflects both the relatively lov labor force participation rate of Hispanic women -- only half of whom are in the work force -- and the fact that both Hispanic men and women have lover median weekly earnings than Black or White workers of the same sex.

FIGURE 6



Median income is much lower in Hispanic female-headed households than in families where both parents are present. The 1985 median family income for female-headed Hispanic families was just 39% of the median income for married-couple families; the corresponding percentage for Black families was 38% and for White families 50%.

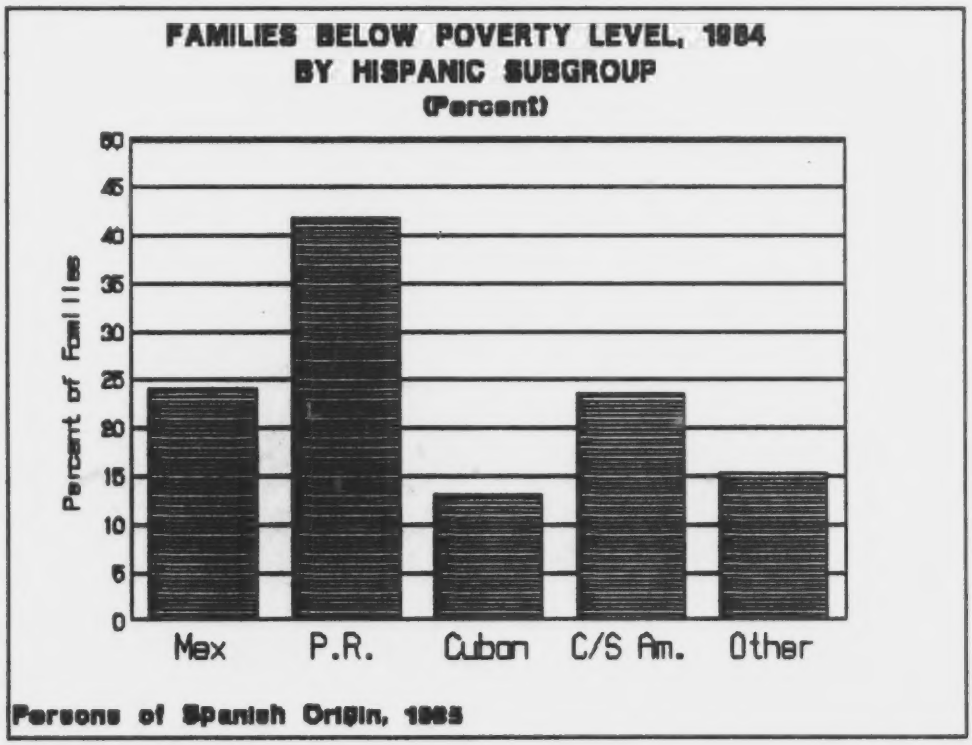
A review of family income by the number of earners in the family shows mixed results. In 1985, Hispanic families with no wage earners or one earner had higher median incomes than Blacks with no earners or one earner. However, Hispanic families with two or three wage earners had incomes below those of Black families with multiple earners; like the figures for married-couple families, these data reflect the low median weekly wages of Hispanic workers. Both Hispanic and Black families with no wage earners had median incomes less than half as great as Whites; this can be partially explained by the larger number of White families whose householders are retired and receive pension and Social Security income.

Data on household net worth make it clear that Hispanic and Black families typically have very limited assets. While only about one in 12 White families (8.4%) had zero or negative net worth in 1984, nearly one-quarter of Hispanic families (23.9%) and three in 10 Black families (30.5%) were in debt or without assets. Only about one in 12 Hispanic families and one in 16 Black families had assets exceeding $100,000, compared to nearly one in four White families. Median net worth for Hispanic families was $4,913 in 1984, slightly above the $3,397 for Blacks, but only about one-eighth the $39,135 for Whites. Hispanics are also less likely than Blacks or Whites to be home owners; in 1984,

just two in five Hispanic households (39.9%) owned homes, compared to more than three in seven Black families (43.8%) and two in three Whites (67.3%). Only about one in 13 Hispanic households and one in 19 Black families owned stocks or mutual fund shares, compared to more than one in five White families. Thus Hispanic and Black families are extremely dependent upon wage income, and are likely to fall into poverty if they are unemployed for even a very brief period.

Poverty rates for Hispanic families are high and growing. In 1985, one in four Hispanic families (25.5%) was poor by federal standards; the poverty rate for Black families was slightly higher (28.7%), while only one in 11 White families (9.1) lived below the poverty level. While the poverty rate for Whites went down 0.2% from 1984 to 1985, and the rate for Blacks decreased by 2.2%, the poverty rate among Hispanics increased by 0.3%. Poverty rates vary tremendously by Hispanic subgroup; in 1984, Puerto Rican families were more than three times as likely as Cuban families -- and Mexican and Central and South Americans twice as likely as Cuban families -- to be poor, as shown in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7



A major determinant of poverty is employment status, but employed Hispanics are more likely than other employed Americans to be poor. While only 5.6% of White families with an employed head of household were poor in 1985, 13.9% of Black and 15.0% of Hispanic families represented the working poor. Poverty rates remained especially high for Hispanic families even when the household head worked 50 or more weeks during the year; just 3.4% of such White families were poor in 1985, compared to 8.6% of Black families and 9.9% of

Hispanic families. Poverty levels were much higher for Hispanic families whose head of household worked less than 50 weeks (34.0%) or was unemployed (44.0%), but increases were even greater for Blacks and Whites. For Black families, the poverty rate was 40.1% where the household head was employed less than 50 weeks and 61.4% where s/he was unemployed; for Whites, the corresponding poverty rates were 18.3% and 30.6%.

The more workers in the family, the less likely the family is to be poor. More than seven in ten Hispanic families with no workers (71.8%) were poor in 1985, compared to 30.5% of families with one wage earner and just 10.8% of those with two workers. Figures were similar for Blacks; the trend was the same for White families, but even when there were no wage earners, only 30.1% of White families were poor, and this proportion dropped to 16.0% with one worker and to 4.6% with two workers.

Many personal and community factors affect Hispanic poverty rates. For example, Hispanic families were especially likely to be poor in 1985 -- they had poverty rates above the Hispanic average -- if they lived in the central cities of metropolitan areas (30.3%) or in rural areas (32.7%). Poverty rates were much higher in the Northeast (36.9%) than in the other regions. The younger the head of household, the higher the poverty rate; the poverty rate for families with a head of household 15-24 was 40.2% in 1985, for 25-44 year-olds, it was 28.5%, and for those 45 and over, less than 17%. Poverty rates also decrease with increasing education. The poverty rate was 36.2% in 1985 for Hispanic families whose household head had less than eight years of schooling and 30.2% for those with one to three years of high school; it decreased to 15.0% for high school graduates and 8.6% for those with one or more years of college.

Large families are especially likely to be poor. In 1985, just 9.6% of Hispanic families with no children were poor, and the poverty rates increased progressively with number of children: 21.4% - one child; 31.3% - two children; 40.4% - three children; 44.9% - four children; 64.6% - five or more children. Trends are similar for Blacks; nearly three-quarters (74.4%) of Black families with five or more children were poor in 1985, compared to a little more than one-third (36.3%) of White families of similar size.

Perhaps the major predictor of poverty among Hispanic families is having a female head of household. The majority of Hispanic (53.1%) and Black (50.5%) female-headed households were poor in 1985, compared to a little more than one-quarter (27.4%) of White female-headed households (See Figure 8). Not surprisingly, poverty rates are especially high for large female-headed families; while less than half of Hispanic and Black female-headed households with just one child were poor in 1985, the proportion went up to about three-fourths for families with three children.

The likelihood of poverty increases greatly if the female head of household is also young. In 1985, more than two-thirds of Hispanic and White female heads of household aged 15-24 were poor, as were nearly seven of eight Black female householders in that age group. The poverty rate decreased to 42.9% for Whites, 50.0% for Hispanics, and 64.5% for Blacks aged 25-34. When the female head of household was 45-54, the poverty rate remained at about 38% for both Hispanics and Blacks but decreased to just 16.7% for Whites (See Figure 9).

FIGURE 8

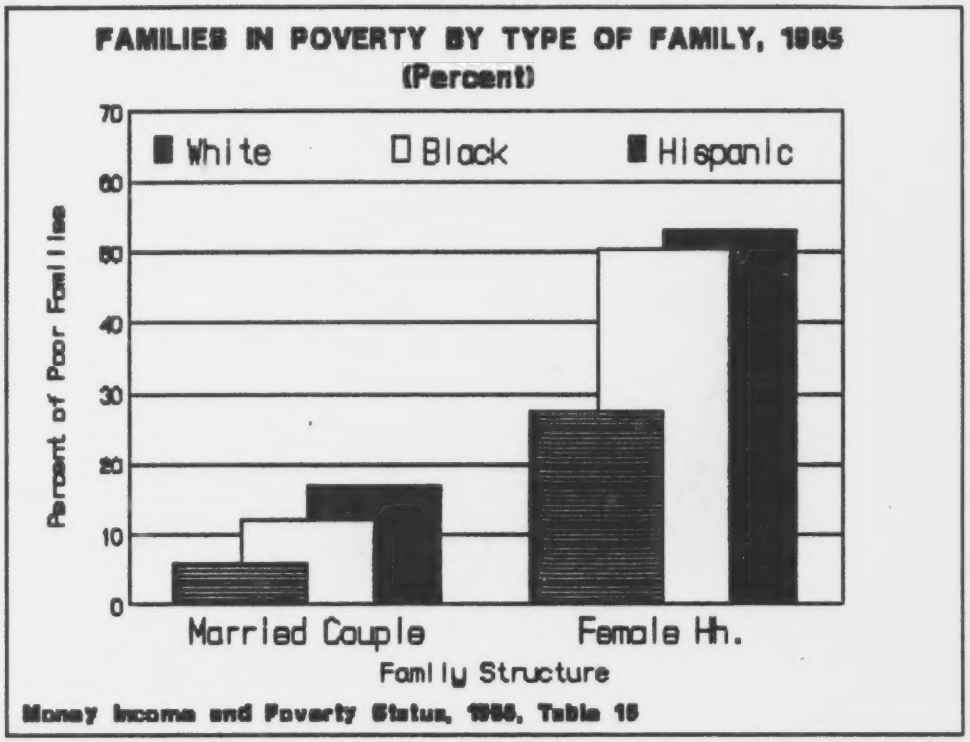
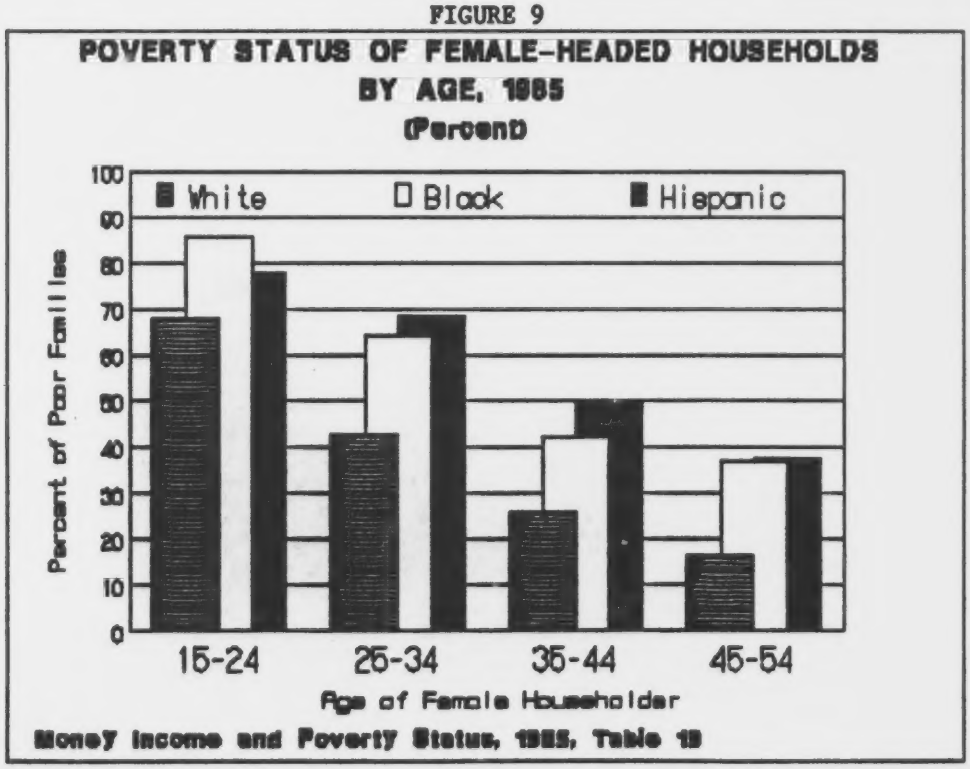
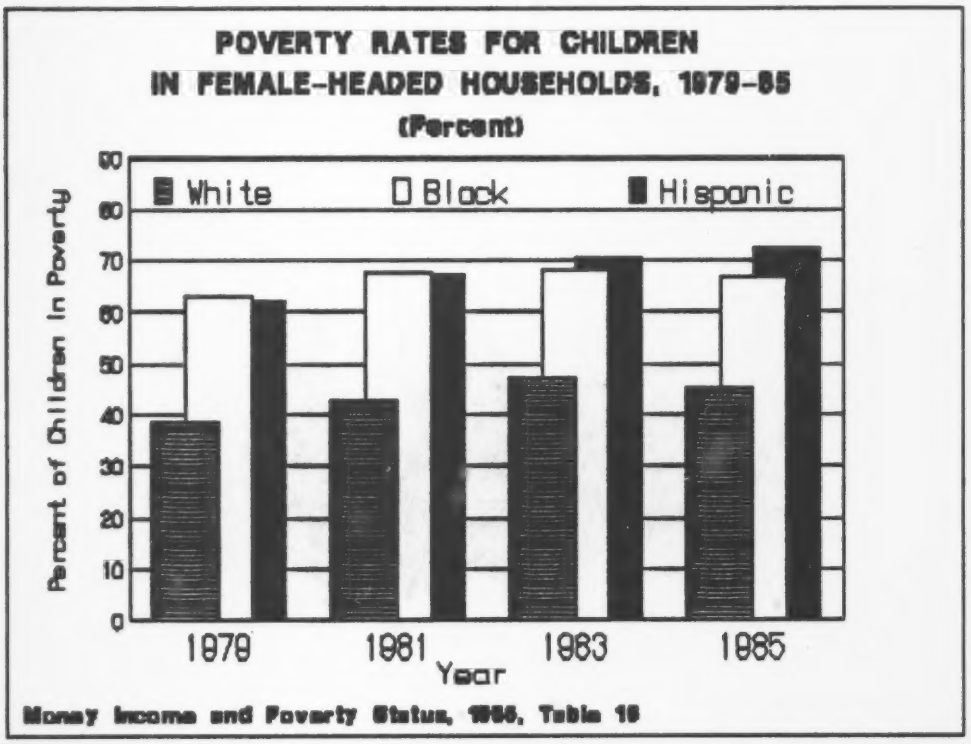


FIGURE 9



These statistics mean that an extremely large proportion of Hispanic children in female-headed households are poor. In 1985, 72.4% of Hispanic children in such families were poor, and this rate has been increasing steadily since 1979. Poverty rates for Hispanic children in female-headed households were slightly higher than for similarly situated Black children (66.9%), and much higher than for White children (45.2%), as shown in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10



Even where the female heads of household are employed full-time, poverty rates remain high. More than three in ten female-headed Hispanic and Black households were poor in 1985 even when the head of household worked 50 or more weeks. More than 16% of Black and Hispanic families remained poor even when the female heads of household were employed full-time, year-round; for Whites with this employment pattern, the poverty rate was 6.5%. One explanation for high poverty rates among Hispanic female-headed families is lov educational levels. Hispanic women are the least educated major female population group, and among female-headed households whose head has less than a high school diploma, more than 60% are poor. The poverty rate goes down to about 25% for those with at least one year of college, two and one-half times the poverty rate for Whites with similar education. The relationship betveen lack of education and poverty is less clear for Black women at educational levels below college.

Information on Hispanic family income and poverty represent great cause for concern, particularly given the close relationship between female-headed households and poverty status, and the probable negative impact of poverty on a growing proportion of Hispanic children.

V. THE FUTURE OF THE HISPANIC FAMILY

A. Influence of Religion on Family Structure

Many cultural and societal factors affect Hispanic family structure; one particularly important factor is religion. It is particularly important for Hispanics, given the large majority who are Catholic, and the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the importance of the family, as well as specific practices regarding marriage, divorce, and birth control.

Religious preference remains one of the characteristics which differentiate Hispanics from the overall population. Of the general U.S. population, in 1983, 56% identified themselves as Protestants, 29% as Catholics, 2% as Jewish, 4% as other religions, and 9% as having no religious identification.

It has been estimated that between 85% and 91% of Hispanic Americans are baptized Catholics, although -- as with non-Hispanics -- a minority are what the Catholic Church considers to be actively participating in their church and parish. Various Protestant groups, especially those which are part of the evangelical movement, have been active in the Hispanic community in recent years, and Hispanic membership in these churches is growing; one Gallup poll estimated that as many as five million Hispanic Catholics have joined evangelical groups during the past decade. Hispanics constitute 30% to 35% of all American Catholics, and the Catholic Church has initiated an "encuentro" movement to increase Hispanic involvement with the Church, and Church responsiveness to Hispanic needs. This effort has reportedly led to increased active participation by Hispanics in the Church over the past five to ten years.

A national survey conducted by the Northeast Catholic Pastoral Center for Hispanics in late 1984 and early 1985 found that 83% of Hispanic Catholics surveyed considered religion to be a very important part of their lives. Many characteristics influenced the perceived importance of religion; for example, women were more likely to consider religion very important than men, the importance of religion decreased with increasing education, and foreign-born, Spanish-speaking, and low-income Catholics were especially likely to consider religion very important.

The survey found that 54% of Hispanic Catholics interviewed reported attending Mass on Sundays, holy days, or more often, and only about 20% reported attending Mass several times a year or less and not engaging in other religious practices. A 1978 Gallup Poll found that 43% of Hispanic Catholics attended Mass four times or more in a month. It is not clear to what extent the difference reflects increased Church involvement versus sampling procedures by the Pastoral Center which may have resulted in a more actively religious sample.

Regarding sexual morality, two-thirds (67.6%) of Hispanic Catholics believed firmly that abortion was always wrong, while 40% believed firmly that artificial contraception was wrong. While 60% of Hispanic Catholics firmly believed that premarital sex was wrong, the percentage was lower for young Hispanics, those born in the United States, those fluent in English, and those with higher education and income and white-collar jobs.

These data suggest that changes in socioeconomic status among Hispanics are likely to be associated with changes in religious belief which will affect family structure. It is unclear to what extent the "encuentro" movement within the Catholic Church or Hispanic affiliation with evangelical churches will counter such changes.

B. Other Trends Affecting the Hispanic Family

The future structure and socioeconomic status of the Hispanic family will be influenced by many population and societal trends. Among the most important for Hispanics are the following:

Hispanics will continue to be the youngest major U.S. subpopulation, but the number of Hispanic elderly will also increase dramatically. Persons over 65 currently make up only 5% of the Hispanic population, but the Hispanic elderly are expected to account for about one-fourth of total Hispanic population growth over the next 20 years. This has implications for family structure and social services; Hispanic elderly have traditionally been less likely to be institutionalized and more likely to live in multi-generational families than other groups of elderly.

Increases in Hispanic teenage pregnancy and divorce rates are likely to mean a continuing increase in the number of female-headed households, representing the Hispanic version of the "feminization of poverty." This has major dangers for Hispanic children, given the extremely high poverty rate among Hispanic children in female-headed households.

The proportion of Hispanic women in the work force can be expected to continue to increase, for economic and other reasons; their labor force participation rate grew from about 41% in 1973 to 50% in 1985. Given the Hispanic population's youth, higher fertility rates, and cultural values favoring children, this will cause a continuing increase in the need and demand for day care.

High rates of teenage unemployment and continued high dropout rates for Hispanic youth threaten the employability of young Hispanics, and are likely to continue the dangerous trend of growing poverty rates. Nationally, at least half of Mexican American and Puerto Rican youth leave school without a high school diploma, and about one-quarter of Hispanic youth were unemployed in 1986. In addition, labor force participation among Hispanic youth has decreased during the 1980s; 1986, Hispanic youth had a labor force participation rate only about three-quarters as high as White youth, and just slightly above Black youth. As Hispanics become an increasing proportion of young adults, it will be important for society as well as to the Hispanic community to improve their education and training so that they can become productive workers able to support their families above the poverty level.

The strength and socioeconomic status of the Hispanic family thus represent a matter of concern not only to Hispanics but also to the overall American society.

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